

Communication in Silence

“Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence...Then there came a voice to him that said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” from I Kings 19:1-18

On occasion we may assume that things are going to turn out badly and give up or give in without an adequate consultation with the Lord. This is what I Kings 19 tells us about no less a person than the prophet Elijah. Jezebel wants his head on a platter, and she’s one scary battleaxe. He’s on the run for his life in chapter 19. His discouragement is so great that he gives up in vs. 4. *“It is enough; now O Lord, take away my life...”*

The Lord, though, teaches Elijah something valid for all times and places. God tells him to go stand on the mountain (Horeb, also known as Sinai). God is going to pass by. And what Elijah experiences initially is something like Jezebel’s fury – rock shattering wind, an earthquake, and fire. But God’s word isn’t found in the rage and racket. God’s voice, containing both encouragement and instruction, comes when all Elijah hears is the *sound of sheer silence*.

At times we may try to figure out what is right or wrong, and the answer does not come. We can be desperate to know God’s will in a certain situation; still, insight takes a holiday. Preparing ourselves to better hear from God is not an exact science. But what I take away from the scripture above is that an environment of silence, an environment in which we can pray free from distraction, is the best environment in which to sort out what God would have us do.

Many of us know this. We certainly see Jesus setting the example elsewhere in the Bible. *“But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.”* Luke 5:16.

But there is more involved than just a distraction-free outer environment. I heard a song the other day on the radio by Carly Simon, and it mentioned how distracting a noisy mind can be. “I Haven’t Got Time for the Pain” contains the lyric, *“You showed me how, how to leave myself behind, How to turn down the noise in my mind.”*

The noise in our minds, often occasioned by “me, me, me”, can keep us from hearing God’s voice. The psalmist, for one, knew this. In Psalm 46: 10 we read, *“Be still and know that I am God!”* He doesn’t say, *“Be distracted and know that I am God!”*

We too often allow our minds to be overtaken by replays of grievances, fears, problems, and worries. We too often try to serve two masters or coexist with mixed motives. Despair can be more deafening than hopefulness. Our plans can be more loudmouthed than God’s demands. We do not always leave ourselves behind when we pray, and so it’s hard for God to communicate with us. Making an effort to turn down the noise in our minds is worth it.

In the mid-1800s a farmer died, leaving his wife to raise eight children and make a living on the family farm. She had her trials, but got both jobs done. Her children would say that key to her strength and success was this practice: every weekday she went into her parlor at 10:00a.m. for ten minutes. Apart from the house or barn catching fire, no one was to bother her. All were to be quiet, whatever they were doing. This was her quiet time with God. - DJ